

“Philanthropy” From Jacob Schiff To Tony Blair

The YouTube website contains some fascinating lectures, and for those of us who were too busy earning a living to attend university, it is not a bad place to begin one’s education. Unfortunately, education may bring learning but it does not necessarily bring wisdom, even for holy men.

On May 18, 2009, Rabbi Leonard Oberstein was filmed lecturing to a small American audience. His subject matter was *Jacob Schiff, A Jewish Philanthropist*. While it is true that Schiff picked up the tab for a large number of good works concerning American Jews, and that poor and especially immigrant Jews have much to thank him for, the Rabbi has allowed himself to be blinded to the suffering that went into the provision of those good works, suffering that was paid for not with Jewish blood, but in part with innocent Russian and Japanese blood.

Schiff came from a wealthy German-Jewish banking family; he emigrated to the United States, becoming an American citizen in 1870.

During the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05 he extended a series of loans to the government of Japan, according to Rabbi Oberstein “because the Tsar of Russia was very anti-Semitic, and the Jews of Russia were very much persecuted....Schiff wanted to do everything he could to undermine the Tsar.”

The Russo-Japanese War was the first time a white nation had been defeated by a non-white one, an act of supreme symbolism; more importantly, it left around a hundred thousand people dead. Of course, ultimately these deaths must be laid at the doors of their respective governments, but instead of profiting from their mutual animosity, Schiff could have used his powers to tone down the hostilities, or perhaps even to avert the war in the first place, instead of spurring it on. A decade later, another Jew, Madame Schwimmer, was instrumental both in forming an anti-war movement and in attempting directly to bring the war then raging in Europe to an end. Although ultimately she and the “Peace Ship” failed, it was better to have tried and failed than not to have tried at all.

The dedication shown by Jacob Schiff to both Jewish and secular causes in America was undoubtedly genuine, but it may just have occurred to him however much he hated the Tsarist régime that he had blood on his hands. Just as undoubtedly other international financiers – Jew and Gentile – must have had the same misgivings throughout history, though like arms dealers they have doubtless consoled themselves with the thought that if they don’t service the demand, one of their rivals will, so why don’t *I* make a few dollars for myself and also make a donation to the charity of my choice? Much closer to home in both distance and time, that same question has undoubtedly occurred to many politicians, none more so than Tony Blair.

Although Jacob Schiff was not a protagonist in the earlier war, the same cannot be said of Blair in relation to Iraq. He was a major player, albeit the junior one in the British-American alliance. Furthermore, previous British governments have been implicated in atrocities against Iraq ever since Saddam Hussein overstepped the mark in 1990 with his invasion of Kuwait.

Tony Blair's decision to donate the entire proceeds of his new book to the Royal British Legion may salve his conscience, but however many millions it makes for disabled servicemen, it can never even begin to wash off the innocent blood that stains his hands.